

Faith to be Faithful Witnesses

Let's turn together to Acts 1. If you're visiting us this morning, we're in a series called Only Believe and we're talking about the importance of maintaining a healthy, growing faith. This morning I want us to look at the relationship between having a healthy faith and being a faithful witness. If our faith is strong, our witness for Christ will be strong. If our faith grows weak, our witness for Christ will also grow weak. It takes faith to be a faithful witness for Christ. Let's begin by reading Acts 1:4

⁴ And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, "you heard from me; ⁵ for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now." Acts 1:4-5

I imagine at this point Jesus' disciples are raring to go. They are as well trained as any group of people could be, they have had the best teaching possible, they have a message burning in their hearts, and they have seen Jesus resurrected so they are confident and excited beyond words to tell people about their living Savior! But Jesus speaks that four letter word that can be so hard to hear: wait. You think you're ready but you're not, wait. What are they waiting for? Look at verse 8:

⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." Acts 1:8

The baptism of the Holy Spirit so that they will have *power* to be Jesus' witnesses. Jesus says something similar in Luke 24: *And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city (wait!) until you are clothed with power from on high."*

Jesus left us really just one job to do until he returns: to be witnesses of what he has done to offer salvation to the world. And he has given us the power to do it. If you are a believer you have the Holy Spirit living in you and therefore you have His power to do what He calls you to do. That's where faith comes in: we should go to God every day asking to be filled and empowered by the Spirit to be faithful witnesses for Christ wherever we go. Church, if we aren't doing that, we are missing the heart of God, no matter what we might be doing. David Platt asks a question that we as believers need to wrestle with:

Is it possible to have all the trappings of the church and miss the heart of Christ? Is it possible for church people to be so focused on personal comforts and so fearful of the potential cost that they virtually forget the purpose of God among the peoples of the world? It is a shame how small churches can become.
David Platt

When the church forgets God's primary purpose in the world, we miss the heart of Christ. We become fixated on small things that don't really mean anything in the light of eternity. God has given us a rescue mission, and He has given us power to do it. I know that messages on witnessing and evangelism can often leave us feeling guilty cause we know we aren't doing it enough and that's not my aim this morning. I don't want us to feel guilty, I want us to feel faith. Faith that God has given us the power we need. Faith that God can use us, use you, to make an eternal difference in someone's life.

This is something we need to grow in, church. I need to grow in. This isn't just a one time message, this will be something we make a major focus this year with the expectation and prayer that God will make this a strength in this church. What I want to do this morning is talk about *why* we should witness and

then look at *how* we should witness. I want to share my indebtedness to Crawford Loritts for his excellent podcast on sharing our faith not only because a couple points I'm going to share were inspired by his message but also because even though I already planned and wanted to share this important message, his podcast got my heart fired up about this in a fresh way.

I. Why should we witness for Christ?

There are a lot of headwinds today against sharing our faith. Faith feels like something that should be private, we feel like we're intruding when we share our faith. Today's culture is also very reactive against telling people how they should live – we all have our truths. If it's good for you, great, but don't tell me what I need to believe. Because of these headwinds, many of us have gone inward with our faith. We don't share it, maybe we don't even speak of it. And yet if we really believe that Jesus is the only way to be saved, then it's got to be a priority that we share our faith. If something is going to be a priority in our lives, it's important that we know the *why* before we know the *how*. So let's consider briefly five reasons why we should witness for Jesus and then I'll share a few thoughts on how we should witness.

1. Witnessing is the primary way we glorify God.

Jesus said “...let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.” *Matt. 5:16*

It's like Jesus is saying he has left us here as lighthouses shining the light of the gospel so that those lost at sea and in danger of perishing can see that light and it can guide them into safe harbor. The goal of our good works isn't so people look at us and say, “what a great person!” It's so that they give glory to God. What Jesus is saying is that our lives should be lighthouses of good works and God's love so people see God's light in us and are led to safe harbor and give glory to God. Witnessing is the primary way we glorify God.

2. Obedience to the Great Commission

Chuck Swindoll has said a lot of Christians treat the Great Commission like it's the Great Suggestion. Jesus' last command to the church is to be his witnesses and make disciples. If we aren't witnessing for Christ and making disciples then we are living in disobedience to Jesus' command.

3. Multiplication of the kingdom of God

The third reason is a mathematical reason: the multiplication of the kingdom of God. God is into expansion by addition. The book of Acts talks a lot about people being added to the church. When someone receives the gospel and believes in Jesus as their Savior, Col. 1:13 says they are rescued from the kingdom of darkness and transferred to the kingdom of Jesus. We get to help increase the population in the kingdom of God by sharing the gospel.

4. We reflect Jesus' heart for the lost

The Son of Man came to seek and save the lost. Luke 19:10

David Platt talks about the church being so caught up in the trappings of church that we miss the heart of Christ. Why did Jesus leave heaven and come to earth? He came to seek and save the lost. Jesus didn't

just come to save lost people who take the initiative to come to him, he takes the initiative to seek and look and find the lost.

Amanda Eller went hiking in a Hawaiian forest on May 12th but didn't come back. Can you imagine how terrible it would be if the news reported that over the next several weeks no one went looking for her? Oh, a lot of people were concerned and would have liked to help but with busy schedules and life happening and all, they just didn't have time to help. You'd be like, "what? What could be more important than trying to find someone lost in the woods? Her life is in danger." What really happened was hundreds, if not thousands, of people dropped everything to go look for her. Because her life is worth far more than daily schedules and yoga classes and watching the latest Bachelorette episode on TV. And the good news is that two and a half weeks after going missing she was found alive and well.

In Luke 15 Jesus tells three parables in a row all about what was lost being found and he says there is more joy in heaven over one lost soul who finds life than over ninety nine who aren't lost. Jesus loves the lost, I mean really loves them, and if we have Jesus' heart we will love the lost too.

5. It's who we are

Jesus said we'd *be* his witnesses in the world. Witnessing is something we do, but deeper than that I think it's something we *are*. The Holy Spirit empowers us to *be* Jesus' witness. That has to do with our identity even more than our actions. Witnessing is what we do because witnesses are what we are. Yesterday we had the Lion King on for the boys, and at one point Mufasa's dad says, "you've forgotten who you are and so have forgotten me." If we aren't being witnesses for Christ, we've forgotten who we are and in that sense have forgotten Christ.

These are just some of the whys to why we should witness. I think most of us probably know we should witness, and we want to be better witnesses for Jesus. We'd love to share Jesus with someone, pray with them, lead them to Christ. But how? We're going to make this a focus in the coming months but here are a couple thoughts to help us first of all make it a priority, connect with God, and equip us to do a better job.

II. How should we witness for Christ?

When it comes to leading a soul from death to life, there is no technique or approach that can help us do that. It's not hard for us to save a soul, it's impossible – we can't do it. It takes God's supernatural power which is why Jesus said we need to be clothed with power and why when it comes to how we should witness we need to begin with prayer.

I like Ron Hutchcraft's three open prayer taken from Col. 4.

² *Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.*³ *At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison—* ⁴ *that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.* Col. 4:2-4

The three open prayer is asking God to do three supernatural things: a) open the door, b) open his/her heart, c) open my mouth.

1. Open the door is asking God for natural, unforced opportunities to talk about Jesus.

Janice was getting her hair done this week and the young woman was asking about what it means to be a Christian. She had gone to church a little bit but really didn't know what Jesus was all about. In the natural course of conversation spiritual things came up, she was asking, and there was a natural opportunity to talk about Jesus.

Praying that God opens the door is different than our kicking down the doors. When I was about 17, the house we lived in was right across the street from a basketball court and I'd go and practice shooting almost every day. This guy who lived on the other side of the basketball court started coming over and we'd shoot together. He was a little older than me and was a professed communist so when I shared my faith with him he was resistant. One day he invited me over to his house and I decided to nail him so I took every conversation hostage for Jesus. I was obnoxious! At one point he said, "what happened? you're not like the nice guy I've been shooting baskets with."

I still cringe when I think about it. God wants us to offer people living water, but He doesn't want us to waterboard them with it! Let's start our day by asking God for unforced, natural opportunities to share our faith. Then look for open doors: it might be that co-worker going through a life crisis. Maybe a conversation that turns to spiritual things –we can even look for opportunities to gently turn it towards spiritual things. It's ok to open the door, just don't kick the door down. Sometimes people open the door by sharing an ideology that is in contradiction to the Christian faith – like my neighbor's communism or someone expressing thoughts about God that are in conflict with what the Bible reveals about God. Don't be afraid, don't get defensive. It's not up to you to convince them, just ask God for wisdom, and walk through that door.

2. Open his/her heart is just that: over and over again the Bible speaks of God opening someone's heart to believe. Opening their eyes to see.

Years ago when I pastored on Long Island, one Sunday I preached from 1 Peter about the genuineness of faith being tested by fiery trials. At the end I gave an altar call for anyone who wanted to accept Jesus as Lord and Savior. It wasn't that kind of message and I didn't expect anyone to respond, but why not.

To my surprise, this young woman comes down the aisle crying. Didn't know her, it was her first time visiting, but the Holy Spirit was gripping her heart. And it was real and lasting. Gina became one of our most exuberant, outspoken members as she and eventually her husband began to attend our church.

It wasn't anything I said. It was God working in her heart, opening her eyes to see her need for Jesus. We can't do that, but we can pray that God do it.

This is where a growing, healthy faith makes such a difference! That person who seems so far from God, so uninterested in Jesus, so hostile to the gospel, isn't beyond the reach of almighty God. Pray with faith and ask God to open his eyes, open her heart.

3. Open my mouth is asking for the boldness of the Holy Spirit

Peter was so fearful and so timid that when a servant girl asked him if he was a follower of Jesus, he's like, "nope, never heard of him!" A month later he's standing up in front of thousands of people and he's

saying this Jesus whom you crucified God has raised from the dead and made Lord and Savior. And the Holy Spirit cut their hearts wide open and thousands believed in Jesus that day.

When we pray “open my mouth” we’re praying that God give us the boldness to confess Christ publicly, to proclaim the gospel, to share our faith, to be witnesses for Jesus. God opens the door, opens their heart, and opens our mouth. Our part is to pray and be ready. God’s part is to save the lost.

Success in witnessing is sharing Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit and leaving the results with God.
Dr. Bill Bright

I want to add one more open:

- 4. Open our hearts.** In other words, ask the Lord to give us His love for people and look for ways to express the love of Jesus to them.

I don’t care how hard someone may appear to be, deep within people want to know if God loves them. They want to know if God cares. God built into us this deep longing to belong to a people, to a family. We want to be cared about, to be loved. No matter what we may accomplish or achieve in life, it doesn’t mean anything if we don’t have love in our lives. But ultimately that longing can never be filled by a human being. We were created for relationship with God, and deep inside people want to know and be convinced God loves them. God so loved the world He gave His only begotten Son to die on the cross to make a way for them to be saved. To make a way for them to be forgiven. It was for love.

God wants to empower us to show His love to them. To overflow the love He’s poured into us out to others. Let’s ask God to open our hearts for the lost and love them the way He loves them. Love can bring down barriers that arguments never will. God hasn’t called us to win arguments, He’s called us to win people. Let’s believe with a fresh faith that God will use us, use each of us, to win people to Christ. To use us to lead them to safe harbor, to welcome them to their eternal home.